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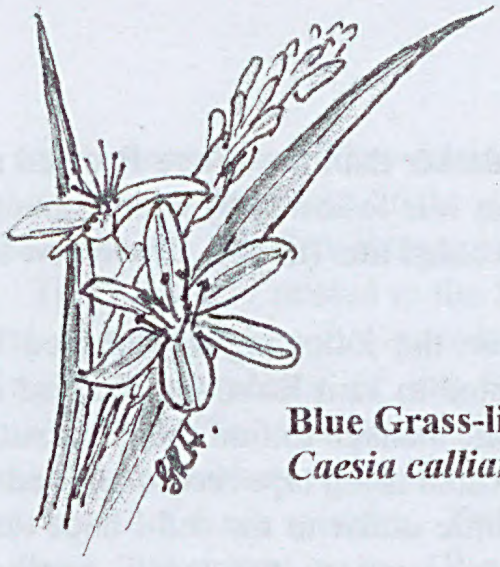

Blue Grass-lily
Caesia calliantha

Seasons Greetings to all!
May 2005 bring increased understanding and caring throughout our world.

Strzelecki Track and Thoughts of 600

I decided, some time ago, that I had few vices in life and that in many ways, my life was a little too ordered. Perhaps I should develop some eccentricities. A simple one was to set a target to see a total of 600 Australian birds. I had always been a "ticker" of bird species, but I never really bothered about the total. I went on a trip to the Kimberley and ticked 48 new birds, then went to Cape York and ticked another 24. My total was around 560, so I went to Christmas Island and found another 12. Silly really, but I was getting quite excited! I discovered a trip run by Philip Maher of Deniliquin, which went due North to the Queensland border, crossed into South Australia, down the Strzelecki Track into the Flinders Ranges, through the mallee and then home. Philip has been doing the trip for nearly 20 years, so I looked at his birdlist and found a reasonable estimate of 15 new birds for me.

The tour departed on 20th August, with 9 birdwatchers together with Philip and Tricia Maher. We headed north for Hillston after first flushing an Australasian Bittern from a swamp near Deniliquin (tick1). Then on to Cobar, giving me my first look at a Spotted Bowerbird (tick2). The trip to Bourke gave me good views of my first Baillon's Crake (tick3), together with many other waterbirds. The weather was starting to warm up after very cold early starts. The birdwatching was very intense, coupled with investigation of the myriad of flowering plants. I have decided to save interest in the latter for my next lifetime.

On the trip the next day came my first real highlight. On the plains north of Bourke we found our first Bourke's Parrot. I have searched for this bird several times before on trips to the centre, but this was my first success. It is a delightful small creature, with exquisite colouring in the right light. Our first views were fleeting, but eventually several birds came into a small water hole and we had really terrific views (tick4). Nearer to Cunamulla we managed to find two Hall's Babblers. These are

somewhat darker than the White Browed and the white on the breast cuts off sooner (tick5). This was followed by good views of the Painted Honeyeater, a bird which has constantly eluded me. (tick6). Three new birds in one day!!

The route on the following day headed West for Thargomindah, via Eulo. I had always wanted to visit Eulo, but the bird count there was a little disappointing. We did, however, manage to find the Chestnut-breasted Quail-thrush nearby (tick7). The bird was located using tape recordings and I have a bit of a problem with that method. It seems a little unfair to me and I hope that its effect on the birds is not all bad. The next day we drove to the lonely outpost of Noccundra and managed to find a Chirupping Wedgebill (tick8), a bird which has managed to elude me on earlier trips.

We then drove down to Tibooburra and next morning set off early to look for the Grey Grasswren - the first of four possible new grasswrens for me. The location was a remote area of lignum to the north of Tibooburra. Initial searching proved unsuccessful, so we stopped for a drink. I was carrying water for a few other participants, so I was last to leave the rest stop. By the time I caught up, the group encouraged me to hurry as they had found a Grey Grasswren and had it set up in the telescope. Just as I put my eye to the scope, the bird vanished! We spent another 3 hours trying to find it – without success. My first failure!

The next day was cold, windy and rain set in during the afternoon. We did manage to find just one Letter-winged Kite (tick9). I arrived in Australia in 1975 and the following year there was an irruption of Letter-winged Kites into Victoria. I didn't quite understand what an irruption was, so didn't bother to go and find them. It has taken me nearly 30 years to make up for that mistake!

We couldn't drive anywhere the following day due to the state of the roads after the rain. We did a long walk around the Bollard's Lagoon property where we were staying, but found very little other than a few Inland Dotterel. Later in the day, the road dried out and we set off for the Strzelecki Track. On top of some of the dunes in the area, sandhill cane grass still exists. Rabbits managed to destroy most of it, but some remains. This is perfect habitat for the Eyrean Grasswren. They took a bit of finding, but we eventually had good views (tick10), before making the long trip down the Strzelecki Track to Lyndhurst. We were up early the next day (in fact we were up early every day!!) looking for the Chestnut-breasted Whiteface. We had to go back up the Strzelecki Track a little to a good site for them. They are really one of the most exquisite small birds that I have seen and we managed to get really good close up views of them. Almost in the same field of view in my binoculars were two Thick-billed Grasswrens. I can't remember the last time I found two new birds without having to put my binoculars down! (ticks11 and 12).

We spent the night in Parachilna after a quick trip to see some Yellow-footed Rock Wallabies, beautiful creatures and unbelievably agile over the rocks of the gorge in which we found them. The next day, we headed into the Flinders Ranges, with an objective of finding the Short-tailed Grasswren. This is closely related to the Striated Grasswren, which is more common further South. In some Guides this is counted as a separate species, whereas in others it is simply a subspecies of the Striated. Regardless of which we chose to believe, it wasn't there. We spent seemingly hours looking for it with no success. Next day we tried again with no luck, before trying another site which looked promising with a good cover of fresh spinifex. Two hours later we heard the calls and found two birds about 200 metres away. We slowly advanced and eventually found the birds less than 20 metres away – sitting up in the spinifex, providing perfect views. They certainly seem different to the Striated, in the length of tail, general colouring on the throat and breast and in the way they hold their tails (tick13).

Next we headed for Burra, then across the Murray to Pinaroo in the Mallee country of the South Australia – Victoria border. There we managed to find the Red-lored Whistler, which I had seen once before and the Purple-gaped Honeyeater (tick14). The weather was closing in as we re-entered Victoria and the trip back to Castlemaine was made inside the bus, watching rain like I haven't seen for quite some time.

All in all, it was a fabulous experience. I managed to find 14 new birds out of the 15 I had hoped for. We saw a total of 220 species, some of which I have not seen for many years. My list now stands at 586 and I have a trip planned to Lord Howe Island in November – perhaps another 12! Surely I can find two more mainland species before then – Powerful Owl, Turquoise Parrot, Pilotbird.....any suggestions?

Nigel Harland

NCCMA Bushland Conservation Programme

This year North Central Catchment Management Authority is seeking to run a single bushland conservation programme over the whole region roughly encompassed by the Mt Alexander Shire and Hepburn Shire north of Daylesford.

You are invited to attend an information session on Thursday 9th Dec, 7.30pm at the Ray Bradfield Room, Castlemaine. Various guest speakers will talk about Goals and Priorities, the Biodiversity Conservation Programme, the Threatened Species Programme, the Loddon and Coliban programmes, Integrated Resource Management and Community Perspective. Supper will be provided. Further info – Mark Walker 5470 6940 or 0409 800 215.

Editor's Note: Thank you to all those people who have contributed to the Castlemaine Naturalist in 2004. I have often had more articles than I could publish. Well done! So out with those notebooks over the summer break – I look forward to hearing from you early in the New Year.

Birds - 61 Hunter Street – Spring 2004

During August two pairs of ravens moved into the pines at Parker Street East behind our block and produced three noisy offspring which found the chimneys and roof of our house a convenient parking spot for feeding. The early mornings were made hideous with their lusty squarks and garglings as the juveniles were fed.

The smaller birds kept a very low profile but red wattlebirds carried on bullying and breeding. Meanwhile the New Hollands and yellow-faced honeyeaters and a pair of Eastern Spinebills continued to breed and forage on everything available – camellias, rhododendron, grevilleas and even the sweet blossoms on the potted cumquat. The crimson rosellas ignored the nesting box and moved on to the low brick chimney of my neighbour's laundry – to her great delight. She was able to watch their progress from a few metres away seated comfortably on her back verandah. A pair of brilliant eastern rosellas and one offspring have regularly visited the baths – along with silvereyes, yellow-rumped thornbills, goldfinches, striated pardalotes and occasional wrens and a solitary willie wagtail. One pardalote nesting box is occupied at present – the other was deserted after I found a tiny egg on the ground underneath , with a pecked hole in one side. Only another pardalote would be able to get into the box, so there's a mystery.

The rufous whistlers have returned to breed in the Buda garden and serenade us around the neighbourhood as they come to bathe. An occasional bronzewing feeds on the nature strip and they are heard calling from 'Buda" or the nearby Kalimna bush.

Also this season there have been several boobooks around – sometimes in the old pepper tree or eucalypt in our backyard and usually calling to others at Buda or across to the lower golf course at the top of Parker street East.

Looking back over the twenty years of our residence here, the birds of the area may have declined in numbers but there is still a good representation of the same varieties. Sparrows and blackbirds are too numerous, but kookaburras are now breeding in the nest box at "Buda" and magpies are always with us, to lead the way in the dawn chorus!

Shirley Parnaby

SEANA Campout in the Little Desert

Reports on the Little Desert campout in October 2004 (with some lovely photos by Muriel Sovar) can now be viewed on the web – Google search for "SEANA naturalists" and then go to the Australian Naturalists Network "Home Page" to "What's New?" and the "Little Desert campout 2004". Thank you Ern.

Observations

- 10/04. Digger's Speedwell in the Morgan's track area is in full bloom at present, and looking very healthy. There is very little re-growth in the ecology – thinned area nearby at this stage and no sign or sound of birds except for a distant Oriole. Shirley Parnaby.
- A neighbour at Lancefield was curious when she looked up from her kitchen sink and noted two very large birds in a tree nearby. On seeking her binoculars she was delighted to discover they were two immature Powerful Owls! Robyn van Smeerdijk
- 12/11Red-rumped Parrot sitting on six eggs in a hollow fence post at Barkers Creek. Geraldine Harris
- Young paper wasps are now emerging from two nests built last summer around our back "verandah". Shirley Parnaby
- The adult blue tongued lizard seems to have deserted us for the yard next door where the duck eggs are actually produced and s/he has the edge on the ravens. But another half grown blue tongue has taken up residence on our side. Shirley Parnaby
- A visit in October to an area of Laureston Forest that had previously been severely burnt revealed a display of Milkmaids that looked like a WA daisy field. Close to Portwine corner there were 100's of eucalypt seedlings but as well there was an abundance of young thistles and also many fallen trees . Ern Perkins
- 16/11 George Broadway was excited as he walked out onto his verandah to see a large bird perched in his oak tree. It appeared to have a coloured band on its leg but binoculars revealed that it was a Little Eagle holding a Musk Lorikeet. It sat in the sun carefully plucking the smaller bird. The lorikeets are feeding on the blossoms of the Lemon Scented Gum that is the best it has been for 20 years.
- Musk Lorikeets are also in abundance at the East Burwood Recreation Reserve (Richard Piesse) and behind the Castlemaine tennis courts (Geraldine Harris).
- Two Wedge-tailed Eagles on Mt Alexander on Sunday 21st Nov. Richard Piesse
- A family of Australian Wood Ducks was sighted heading down Brown St. towards Butterworth St – they turned into Butterworth St. and it is thought they were probably heading down to the creek with their young who were too young to fly – so had to walk all the way! Athol Dorman
- A Grey Shrike-thrush was seen going into a gap in the slate wall of the old slate quarries in Specimen Gully Road – it was probably nesting there. Rita Mills
- Doug Mills saw a pair of fox cubs along the railway near Blakeley Road.
- A Painted Honeyeater was seen at Chinaman's Point, half way to Expedition Pass. Ern Parkins
- On a walk with Golden Point Landcare along Forest Creek to Chinaman's Point, 33 different birds were identified in the various habitats there. Richard Piesse

Climate Change in Central Victoria

Climate change is a reality. The 20th century was the warmest the world has seen in 1,800 years. The 1990's were the warmest decade on record. The evidence is that human activities are interfering with the climate and the human induced climate change will continue for many centuries. The earth is warming in response to the increasing levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere. Carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide are the chief contributors to climate change; carbon dioxide is the main agent produced by burning of fossil fuels for electricity, road vehicles, and land clearing.

Global warming will lead to many changes in the climate system involving rain levels, wind patterns and weather variations. The rate of climate change can be slowed, by reducing greenhouse emissions but some level of climate change is inevitable and needs to be planned for now.

The latest work of CSIRO in climate modelling and projections suggests that by the year 2030:

- Central Victoria is likely to be 2 degrees warmer and 5 degrees warmer by 2070.
- The frequency of extreme max. temps. will increase.
- The frequency of frosts is likely to decrease.
- Annual rainfall decreases in inland regions are likely to the order of 15%.
- Drier conditions in winter and spring are expected and droughts more frequent.
- Extreme rainfall events may become more intense and more frequent in summer.
- Higher evaporation with less rainfall is likely to increase moisture stress.
- Marked reduction in runoff to rivers in the vital Murray/Darling basin.

If emissions were stabilized and then reduced to zero it will take a further 300 years for the atmosphere to return to pre-industrial levels of greenhouse gases.

Australia's Chief Scientist is calling for an 80% reduction in greenhouse gases by the end of this century. A report by the World Wildlife Fund for Nature, developed in company with industry associations, found sufficient clean energy resources available today to deliver Australia's energy needs and cut greenhouse emissions by 50% by 2040. But are greenhouse gases the sole villains? There may be natural variability and increased atmospheric pressure going on apart from the greenhouse effect.

The name of the game is going to be adaptability. How we can collectively meet the threat of global warming!

Chris Morris

Congratulations

Congratulations to Francis Cincotta for her success in the DSE photo competition. You can see Frances's photo and written piece in the 2005 calendar that is now available free from the department office.

Watermark Australia

Australians need to reassess their use of water resources. **Watermark Australia** is an independent community based initiative developed by the Victorian Women's Trust to provide a means for people to engage on the issue of water to learn, share and make changes and adjustments with regard to water. This is an opportunity to bring together the wide experience and knowledge of scientists, technicians and other people working on water issues.

There are two ways you can become involved:

Become a Group Convenor of a group of up to nine other friends/workmates etc leading the discussion with material provided by the Watermark Team and reporting back to the team, or

Join a group in your area.

Public Information Session for the Castlemaine area:

24th Feb 2005 Thursday 7.30-9.30pm Ray Bradfield Room, Castlemaine.

Or join the project on-line at http://watermarkaustralia.org.au

From the Business Meeting 25/11/04

Stuart Morris put forward a proposal to print and laminate sheets of some of his excellent **coloured photos of local wildflowers** to be offered to the Shire for tourism promotions and also for possible use by the FN Club. This idea was adopted and $50 allocated to cover the initial cost. Six sheets are to be prepared for printing.

Thank you to all those members who participated in the **Roadside Conservation Project**. Special thanks to Rita, Richard, Penny and John who did much of the work.

Ern and Hans have potted up **Dianella admixta plants** collected from road widening works on the Pyrenees Highway. These plants will be transplanted next autumn.

Extra Events for your Calendar

Mar. 11 - 14. 2005. SEANA Autumn Campout– Exploring our Forests and Waterways. Eildon Mountain Lodge. Host: The Upper Goulburn FN Club. (See October CN for details). Application Forms: Ern Perkins 5472 3124.

Oct. 14 – 18. 2005. SEANA Spring Get –Together. Mallacoota. Host: Sale FN Club. (See November CN for accommodation details). Further info: Ern Perkins.

Feb. 2006 Australian Naturalists' Network. The fourth Campout in Feb 2006 is to be held at Harrietville / Perisher Valley or Jindabyne. If interested register intention to attend. Application Forms: Ern Perkins Ph 5472 3124

Articles Welcome - Articles, reports and observations can be left at Tonks Bros. in Barkers St. or sent to Geraldine Harris, P.O.Box 184, Castlemaine, 3450.
Ph. 5474 2244, or gedharris@castlemaine.net
Please submit articles by the fourth Thursday of the month.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Programme- December 04

General meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 8.00 pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.
Excursions are usually on the Saturday following the general meeting and leave promptly at the times stated from The Octopus, opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days. BYO morning and afternoon tea.
Business meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the fourth Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30 pm. All members are invited to attend.
VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS.

Sat. Dec. 4. ***Annual Bird Challenge.*** (See details page 1, CN November 2004) Contact Maureen and Ken Dredge Ph. 5470 6474 by Dec 1.
Fri. Dec. 10. ***Members and Visitors Night.*** A traditional "Show and Tell" night. Bring along a few slides to share of a favourite place or subject, present a book review or an anecdote of a club outing you particularly enjoyed. Be as creative as you like. Bring a plate of supper. 8pm. UCA Hall.
Sat. Dec. 11. ***St. George's Lake, Creswick.*** Leader: Chris Morris. Time to be decided at the December meeting.

2005

Fri. Feb. 11. Sri Lanka: Elephants, Peacocks and the Rest. Jason Edwards, Wildlife photographer. UCA hall, 8pm.
Sat. Feb. 12. ***Malmsbury Reservoir and Gardens.*** Leader: George Broadway. Leave Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.
Fri. Mar. 11. Speaker to be decided.
Sat. Mar. 12. ***Macedon Regional Park Foothills.*** Leader: Richard Piesse. Leave the Octopus at 1.30pm sharp.

2004 Committee - Chris Morris (President) Ph. 9885 4221; Rita Mills (Vice President and Public Officer) Ph. 54724553; George Broadway (Secretary) Ph. 5472 2513; Hans van Gemert (Treasurer) Ph. 5472 1082; Geraldine Harris (Newsletter Ed.) Ph. 5474 2244; Ern Perkins Ph. 5472 3124; Richard Piesse; Athol Dorman and Nigel Harland.

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